

Critical Identities: Rethinking Feminism Through Transgender Politics

Eleanor MacDonald

ABSTRACT

Feminist theory, in both its identity-based and its anti-essentialist versions, has denied the validity of transgendered people's experience. Rather, feminism needs to retheorize its understanding of identity in light of new insights offered by transgendered people's experience into the structural and systemic production of "liminal" or "boundary" conditions within political communities.

RÉSUMÉ

La théorie féministe dans ses deux versions l'une basée sur l'identité et l'autre anti-essentialiste a rejeté la validité de l'expérience des transgendérisés. Le féminisme devrait plutôt remettre en théorie sa compréhension de l'identité en tenant compte de l'expérience des transgendérisés dans la production structurelle et systémique des conditions "limitrophes" ou "frontières" au sein des communautés politiques.

INTRODUCTION

Feminist theorists have responded to the emerging political movement of transgendered people and the corresponding theorization of transgendered identities in a variety of ways, all of them disquieting.¹ By turns, feminists have denounced transgendered people as dangerous to feminism, depoliticized the experiences of transgendered people, or celebrated the transgendered identity as emblematic of the subversive character of feminist postmodern theory. None of these positions is adequate to the real challenges that transgendered people offer to the categories of both identity-based and postmodern feminist theorizing.

All too frequently feminism's relationship to transgender politics has been expressed as one of direct hostility and exclusion. The classic (and until quite recently, nearly the exclusive) feminist statement on the issue of transsexualism was Janice Raymond's book, *Transsexual Empire: The Making of the She-Male*. Raymond's dramatic opposition of feminism to transgendered people and politics is made clear throughout; it is perhaps most evident when she likens the transsexual woman to a rapist:

All transsexuals rape women's bodies by reducing the real female form to an artifact, appropriating this body for themselves. However, the transsexually constructed lesbian-feminist violates women's sexuality and spirit, as well. Rape, although it is usually done by force, can also be accomplished by deception.

(1979, 104)

This reasoning has regularly been used to justify the exclusion of transgendered women from women-only services, events, gatherings.² And, while transgendered women are portrayed as utilizing a Trojan Horse style of infiltration and violation of the "safe space" of the women's community, transgendered men are, in turn, often treated as dupes of the patriarchy and as traitors to their sex, as women who might have been "sisters in the struggle," but who instead joined the ranks of (presumably always anti-feminist) men. Raymond, in fact, treats transgendered men not as choosing their transition, but as having it inflicted upon them as patriarchy's way of destroying women who challenge femininity:

...the aim would be to assimilate those women who do not conform to the male standards of femininity. It is important to understand that assimilation equals elimination. Not being able to assimilate would-be males into the feminine, patriarchy assimilates them into the masculine. (1979, xxiii)

While Raymond's position seems extreme in its gender determinism, it reflects a deep ambivalence in the relationship of feminism to the question of gender. We find simultaneously the contradictory positions that gender is an inherently patriarchal structure that women can, indeed must, defeat or transcend, and that gendered femininity is itself an expression of feminism. This latter position is expressed in terms of, for example, the belief in an inherent strength, spirituality, sexuality, and/or creativity that women can draw upon. Gender is viewed as mutable and socially constructed while, in the same breath, it is contradictorily presented as determined immutably by one's assigned sex at birth and upbringing. No thought is given to the unique perspectives that transgendered people might have to contribute to the understanding of gender experience, gender relations or of women's oppression.

Perhaps the more common, but less vocal attitude of most feminists has been to sidestep transgender issues as inherently apolitical. The assumption has been, by feminists and by society more generally, that transsexualism is a medical or psychiatric problem, and therefore the private concern of rare individuals. Again, with this attitude, transgender experience is effectively eliminated from political concern; the gender concerns raised by transgendered individuals are not incorporated into feminist theories of gender at all.³

More recently, postmodern feminist theory has begun to embrace transgender as an expression of diversity and difference, and as playing a strategic role in breaking down the binary dualisms of Western metaphysical thought. The new pluralist celebration of diversity is certainly vastly preferable to the hostility or dismissiveness expressed in other models of feminism. Nevertheless, it may run the

same risks as liberal tolerance of difference, which in the end does little to recognize the specificity of particular subject positions. In its promotion of transgender identity as a transcendence of identity, postmodern theory assimilates transgender to its own intellectual project through presenting transgendered experience as chimera, play, performance or strategy. It does so at the expense of investigating the actual lives, political demands, or feelings expressed by transgendered people of having an identity that is often experienced as "authentic" or "integral" and that is considered to be neither "chosen" originally nor "performed" strategically. This point is well made by Ki Namaste in her critique of some of the directions taken by postmodern-influenced queer theory:

In recent years, the field known as queer theory has witnessed a veritable explosion of essays, presentations, and books on the subjects of drag, gender, performance, and transsexuality. Yet these works have shown very little concern for those who identify and live as drag queens, transsexuals, and/or transgendered. The violation of compulsory sex/gender relations is one of the topics most frequently addressed by critics in queer theory. These discussions, however rarely consider the implications of an enforced sex/gender system for people who live outside it....[C]ritics in queer theory write page after page on the inherent liberation in the transgression of gender codes but they have nothing to say about the precarious position of the transsexual woman who is battered, and who is unable to access a women's shelter because she was not born a biological woman.

(1996, 183-4)

It is my argument that transgender politics and transgendered people's experiences must be taken seriously by both more traditional gender identity-based feminism and contemporary postmodern feminism. In addressing transgender politics' challenge to the boundaries of gender identity, traditional feminist approaches need to

critique their own exclusionary practices, and challenge their own understanding of gender and sexuality. In the direct and visceral terms in which transgendered people experience the boundaries and instability of identity that are celebrated in the postmodern feminist theoretical approach, the latter must take seriously the demand for a more programmatic agenda for postmodern feminist thought.

In what follows, my arguments are based on the insights that may be gained from examining transgender as an "identity." It is my hope that out of examining the distinctive contributions of transgender identity to identity politics, new grounds may be found for alliances among varied social movements. These grounds would be based not in identity as much as in understanding and in a recognition of the power of exclusion.

TRANSGENDER IDENTITY POLITICS

The growth of new social movements, organized around the salient experiences of oppression of different identity groups, has engendered a corresponding intellectual study of identities, of how we come to acquire an identity, of what an identity means, and of how identities become socially recognized, defined, and politicized. Each identity-based social movement has made unique contributions to these debates.

The transgender political movement has only recently gained public recognition. Alongside this newfound political status, new ways of conceptualizing and defining what transgender means are also emerging. And, as with other identity-based movements, transgender politics is providing singular challenges to how we think about identities and their politicization. In what follows, I argue that what transgender identity specifically problematizes is identity itself. Transgender identity is about identity experienced as problematic; the experience of being transgender problematizes the relationship of the self to the body, and the self to others. In doing so, it also problematizes issues of identity boundaries, stability and coherence.

I also intend that, as with the study of other identity groups, the insights that can be

gained from an exploration of transgender identity do not apply only to transgendered people, but can be extended to other identities as well.

IDENTITY AS PROBLEM

The term "transgender" has only very recently come into popular and political use, and its definition is critical to the politics that it engenders. The term, as I use it, includes all those people whose internally felt sense of core gender identity does not correspond to their assigned sex at birth or in which they were raised. This includes people who identify with the gender other than that assigned at birth as well as those who do not identify with any gender at all. It includes those who present themselves in their originally assigned sex, as well as those who present themselves in the sex which coheres with their actual identity (and therefore may include non- and pre- and post-operative transsexual people) and those who move back and forth between self-presentation as women and as men. It also includes those whose gender presentation is ambiguous in ways which don't permit them to present as either gendered male or female. In this usage, the term does not include those who are both physically and emotionally comfortable in their assigned sex and gender, even while they are challenging the social meanings that have been traditionally assigned to that sex and gender. What is radical, then, to the definition of "transgender" is its origin in a problem, a disjunction between one's feelings of who one is or is not, and how one is (or has once been) perceived, recognized, and understood by others.

Gender and sex are both complex terms, whose complexity is not acknowledged in their daily usage. Sex includes, at a minimum, chromosomal sex, gonadal sex, hormonal sex, internal reproductive organs, external genitals, assigned sex, and gender role (Nataf 1996, 14). Much scientific evidence not only points to the non-congruence of all these variables in all cases, but also to their non-binary nature. Despite this, it is customary to presume the presence of two and only two fully congruent and "opposite" sexes, male and female. Moreover, external genitalia

remain the primary factor in attributing sex (O'Donovan, cited in Nataf, 14; Kessler in Nelson and Robinson 1995, 13).

Gender, in turn, is expected to cohere unproblematically with sex. But gender too involves a rich complex of variables, including: gender assignment (which generally takes place at birth, after which it is considered immutable); roles (specific social activities which are assigned masculine and feminine status); identity (one's internally felt or experienced sense of being either male or female); status (social rank which is accorded to males or females or those performing masculine or feminine roles); relations (socially appropriate behaviours evinced by males or females in relation to other males and females); attribution (perception by others of one's sex that takes place in all social interaction); behaviour (use of the gestures, mannerisms, language, clothing, comportment considered appropriate to one's biological sex); and biology (genetic or sexual-physical predeterminants of any of the above).⁴

What transgender identity is about is identity as the incoherence of these elements, as the felt incoherence of self and body; it is identity as non-identity of the self, according to one of the principle means by which the coherence of the self is supposed to be unconsciously achieved. For some transgendered people, the experience of a non-coherence of body and self is a permanent condition; for others, this coherence is achieved as a conscious, very often medicalized process.

Much of what is unique about transgender identity, as an identity, is this reference to the identity as, in itself, problematic, as based in the profound sense of gender "dysphoria," of a disruption between one's sense of one's own gender and one's body. It is therefore simultaneously a problem of the relationship of self to self (mind/body) and self to others (the individual to culture, society, etc.) Transgender politics points to the refusal of this problem to be exclusively resolved either at the individual level or at the societal level.

The individual solutions (self-denial, passing, surgical sex re-assignment) are, to many, unacceptable. As Kate Bornstein remarks,

regarding the advice given to post-operative transsexuals to "invent" a new childhood, and a new past for oneself, and to destroy evidence of one's previous sex: "transsexuality is the only condition for which the therapy is to lie" (1994, 62). Non-recognition, or discontinuity between one's felt self and the perception of others merely continues in a new guise. These solutions also ignore the voices of those who feel that their gender cannot be recognized within the binary categories of male and female, and who wish to create a space for recognition of themselves as transgender, third sex, two-spirited, intersex, epicene, or androgyne.⁵

While individual solutions seem inadequate in their repetition of the denial, incoherence, or intransigence of the transgender condition, solutions at the societal level are frankly insensitive to the specific needs of transgendered people, and not infrequently utopian in their goals. The desire to move to a point where "gender doesn't matter," either through the abolition of gender (one of the goals of many versions of feminist politics), or through the proliferation of gender in performance and play (the postmodern feminist take on the problem) has wide appeal and credibility (including within the transgendered community), but too often is used as an excuse either to criticize or deny the experiences of transgendered people.

In light of this, I must remark upon how the pronouncement that "gender shouldn't matter" is used by many feminists to portray transgendered people as inherently gender conformists, and consequently anti-feminist in their politics. First, it is necessary to acknowledge that the use (both playful and serious) of stereotypes and gender conformity may be a very real pleasure for those who have long desired recognition in their gender. And, aside from the strong likelihood that some transgendered people will feel relief and pleasure in a new gender role, this unfair criticism serves to stereotype all transgendered people and denies the existence of those - and they are many - who also challenge those stereotypes. As well, it should be emphasized that stereotypically gendered behaviour and attitudes are often a prerequisite for being taken seriously as transgendered, especially by the medical community, on whom transgendered

people are entirely reliant for receiving hormones or surgery. And, further to all of this, an appropriate rejoinder to the critic might be, simply, that one way of being gender-nonconformist is to refuse to accept the mandatory congruence of sex and gender.

Further to this, there has been insufficient recognition among feminists who do not experience a core sense of gender-incongruity, of their own participation in maintaining a rigid binary sex/gender system. With the goal of ending women's oppression, feminists have themselves often maintained gender systems, albeit "alternative" ones, designed to stand in direct opposition to those of the dominant society. These are manifest throughout feminist writing and organizing. One sees them in the continued assignment of femininity and masculinity to specific behaviours, in the differential treatment of women and men, in the celebration of specific aspects of femininity (often, and justifiably, to redress the common social repudiation of these human qualities and characteristics by mainstream society). Similarly, the gay and lesbian communities, while clearly challenging the heterosexual norms that are corollary to the sex/gender system, and while often creating welcoming space for androgynous people, for passing men and women, and for a range of gender expression, have nonetheless not questioned deeply what it means to be attracted to a particular "sex." Far too often, transgendered people are criticized for changing or desiring to change their sex, for not having "transcended" the link of body to gender expressed as "sex," by others who readily and comfortably desire a "sex," an embodied gender. From both the feminist and the gay and lesbian communities, the critique of traditional gender systems has stayed at the level of criticizing the attribution of specific gender behaviours to specific sexes, and not moved beyond this to consider the implications of having a gender at the level of personal identity. It needs to be said that few among the non-transgendered have pondered for long the luxury of living in a body that feels at ease and consonant with the self.

The criticism that transgendered people have too great an investment in gender finds a

strong opponent in the new postmodern celebration of transgender as transcending gender. But this postmodern reading of transgender, too, unfortunately effaces much of the transgender experience. When Kate Bornstein (1994), a transgender performance artist, comments in distinctly postmodern tones on the fluidity she has found in her expression of identity, she writes:

I love the idea of being without an identity, it gives me a lot of room to play around; but it makes me dizzy, having nowhere to hang my hat. When I get too tired of not having an identity, I take one on: it doesn't really matter what identity I take on, as long as it's recognizable. I can be a writer, a lover, a confidante, a femme, a top, or a woman. I retreat into definition as a way of demarcating my space, a way of saying "Step back, I'm getting crowded here." (39)

Yet what is significant about Bornstein's list of chosen identities is its limitations, as much as its freedom. Despite what she says, it does indeed matter to her what identity she takes on; it matters that it be "recognizable." Elsewhere in her book, she remarks:

I've no idea what "a woman" feels like. I never did feel like a girl or a woman; rather, it was my unshakable conviction that I was not a boy or a man. It was the absence of feeling, rather than its presence, that convinced me to change my gender...Gender identity answers another question: "to which gender (class) do I want to belong?" Being and belonging are closely related concepts when it comes to gender. I felt I was a woman (being), and more importantly, I felt I belonged with the other women (belonging). (24)

Bornstein is among the most postmodern-influenced of current transgender activists. This is evident in her discussion of the fluidity of identity, the problem of categorization. And yet even in this celebration of difference and

non-identity, Bornstein's work reflects something which the postmodern advocacy of the proliferation of all identities and all categories cannot explain - the sense of authenticity of a particular identity or closed set of identities. Bornstein is representative of, as Califia argues, the more recent political transgender activists who have been influenced by feminism, postmodernism, and sexual liberation politics. So it is striking the degree to which even while arguing for postmodern post-identity, she continues to adhere to the "truth" of certain experiences and identities.

Much of what is published about transgender identity takes autobiographical form, and throughout these autobiographies, the authors deal with the problem of how to describe to others the need for an integrated and authentic sense of self, and the relief that comes through attaining this in sex reassignment. To take only one example, Max Wolf Valerio explains:

I think most people don't understand how transsexuals feel about our original biological selves. Everyone experiences this discontinuity between identity and body slightly differently, but there's a commonality. For me, it wasn't so much that I hated my body or hated being a woman. First of all, even as I say that I was a woman, that feels as though somehow, it really wasn't true. At some point, I realized that my deepest, most abiding sense of myself was male. When I saw that there was an alternative, that the hormones really work, I knew that I would rather live my life as a man. As a man, a more integrated sense of myself began to emerge. (Feinberg 1996, 142)

Perhaps, in responding to the postmodern challenge to the fixity or stability of identity, what we discover is that there is a range of identities within which one can "manoeuvre" but the transgender experience suggests that there are limitations, too, on one's sense of who one is, outside of which one feels oneself harmed, mis-recognized, mis-taken. To extend this challenge beyond transgender is to suggest to other

identity politics movements that it is still necessary to discover the problematic aspect of an identity that is too readily overlooked in the claiming of, for example, lesbian, gay or bisexual pride, or of feminist consciousness.

IDENTITY AS CONTESTED

Transgendered people's experience of gender identity as inherently problematic is compounded by the experience of it as both contested and contestable. One's gender is, of course, not one's own decision. Typically assigned at birth, it is, happily one supposes, experienced by most people as unproblematic. When issues arise over it, they usually regard the content socially accorded to gender (of socially appropriate femininity or masculinity, for example, and these in turn are often further specified within class or race dynamics), not the assignment of gender itself. Feminists, for example, and rightly, struggle over changing the meaning of what it is to be a woman, expanding the boundaries of possibilities to allow for greater freedom in women's (and men's) lives. Transgender politics, on the other hand, is often about how the categories of, and the boundary between, male and female, or masculine and feminine, are set at all.

There are at least two sites in which the contestation over transgender identity takes place. The more obvious is, of course, the entire social sphere of the transgendered person's life. Virtually no social spaces exist in which the existence of transgendered people is recognized and accepted. The lesbian, gay and bisexual movement protests the presumption of heterosexuality; the transgender movement protests the even more common presumption of sex/gender identity congruity. For transgendered people, to "come out" as transgendered means frequently to have one's gender identity disputed, contested, disbelieved, or fully denied. Having to prove to others that you really are who you say you are is a task which might appear surreal if it weren't also, for many transgendered people, quotidian.

Transgendered people are faced with a limited range of options for living with an identity that is both felt within as problematic and

continuously contested by the society without. Many choose medical intervention and surgical sex reassignment. But doing so requires confronting another site in which one's transgender identity is contested, in which further "proof" is required. Transgender identity is eligible for medical intervention in accordance with its status as a psychiatric condition, currently listed as "gender dysphoria" for which the diagnosis is based on a fixed set of diagnostic criteria. Transgendered people seeking sex reassignment must prove to a committee of medical authorities that they indeed meet these criteria. More than one author has noted the conservative effect of these measures - individuals seeking medical assistance are usually both aware of, and fully prepared to conform to whatever criteria they understand will provide them with the medical diagnosis needed for sex-reassignment surgery and hormone treatment to be offered. Thus, the diagnostic tools are repeatedly confirmed in this process.

Aside from the considerable social stigma of claiming an identity which is also considered a psychiatric disorder, the medicalization of transgendered people also may be experienced as disempowering; one's own identity can be disputed or overturned by a panel of medical personnel. The *Standards of Care: The Hormonal and Surgical Sex Reassignment of Gender Dysphoric Persons*⁶ also leaves little room for individual variations or preferences of transgendered people in determining the course of any medical assistance they may seek. A rigid binary gender system remains the basis for evaluating and reassigning sex.

Despite all the difficulties presented in the medical treatment of transgendered people, there is very real concern and debate in the transgendered community that the demedicalization of "gender dysphoria" would put an end to all insurance coverage of drugs or surgery, effectively putting surgical options out of reach for all but the most wealthy. Ironically, the very site of contestation of an identity also serves societally, in many respects, as its validation and support.

IDENTITY AS LIMINAL

Postmodern theory has introduced the

concept of "liminality" as critical to our understanding of identities. What is liminal is on the threshold, the edge, or the border, the "no-man's" land that exists in places between borders, where no rules hold, where contests over authority sometimes take place. The concept of the liminal is valuable for critical thinking, for asking questions about what establishes the boundary limits of the categories we use, and for considering how these categories can be destabilized, or how these boundaries are transgressed. At times, however, postmodern theorists risk romanticizing this concept of liminality. Living on borderlines becomes a kind of thought experiment, either explored in the intellectual and academic arena, in the often esoteric literature and filmic representations of liminality as the principal arena for the contestation of meanings, or in the personal arena as a kind of recreational play.

Transgender identity is useful in giving flesh to this postmodern conceptualization of "liminality" in identity. Because transgender identity is experienced as exclusion from or harm by the existing categories of "gender," it provokes the question of how those categories are established. How are they maintained? How are the boundaries of what is normal "policed?" How can they be transgressed? Transgendered people often experience, and frequently painfully so, living on these borders, and the costs of transgressing them.

To the degree that the categories themselves, and the social investment in maintaining them, are politicized, transgender politics raise questions of how one disrupts and destabilizes existing category boundaries. In doing so, transgender politics directly challenge the stabilization of category boundaries that has become part of the quest of many other identity-based movements (i.e. who qualifies as gay or lesbian, who can be a feminist, who is a woman, etc.)

The category of "transgender" also rapidly proliferates in interesting ways suggesting that there may be unique aspects to the creation of any sort of solidarity within the transgendered movement. Consider the range of MTF, FTM, non-op, pre-op, post-op, third sex, androgyne, epicene, two-spirited, and intersexed identities. When one considers as

well that transgendered people frequently go through transitions which move them from one of these categories into another, one gets a sense too of the fluidity of identifications that transgendered people may experience. Transgendered people may also experience leaving the identity of "transgendered" behind, as they, through surgery or hormones, come to experience a sense of mind/body and societal/self congruity more typical of the non-transgendered. Add to this that all of the categories are, of course, made infinitely more complex by the necessary intersection of all transgendered identities with the full range of class, race, sexual orientation, cultural and other identities (and that all of these have an effect on how gender, and with it, transgender, will be experienced).

CONCLUSIONS

The effect of these challenges and of these distinctive aspects of transgendered identity is to emphasize the need for alternative bases for social movement politics. Transgender politics is not (and, I would argue, cannot be) based on identities that are experienced as solid, permanent, exclusionary, whole. Rather it is in the nature of the identity itself to be problematic, contested, transgressive, and liminal. It is in the capacity of the identity to indicate spaces of liminality and difference *within itself* that presents new challenges to previous theoretical paradigms of identity formation. If transgendered identity is experienced in this way, it serves also to problematize and contest other identity categories, and the politics that stem from them.

To a very large degree, these aspects of transgender identity have appeared to align it most closely with postmodern theory in its celebration of fluidity, dispersal, liminality, and so forth. But I argue that what characterizes transgender identity

can also serve to indicate some of the limitations of the postmodern theoretical approach. Too often postmodern approaches validate difference at a linguistic level without considering the lived experience of difference. Outside of concrete proposals for social change, such an approach seriously risks minimizing the experience of really living on borderlines, of the incoherence that often accompanies shifts in identity, of the difficulty in establishing a self that can withstand its contestation, and thus risk taking an attitude of indifference or complacency toward these experiences. To postmodern theory, transgender argues, then, for the reality of difference, and the need to investigate the social structures which enforce sex/gender identity congruity and stability at every level.

To identity-based feminist theory, on the other hand, transgender politics argues for a destabilization of the categories of woman and man, of lesbian, gay and bisexuals. Instead, I argue that what transgendered identity politics generates is new motivation to move beyond identity as the basis of social movement politics and into new exploration of the ethical bases of alliances and formation of communities. As well, and critically, it demands an exploration of the structural and systemic production of "contested" and "liminal" sites within every political community, including feminism, and the responsibility for breaking down the exclusionary and limiting effects that these boundaries have on us all.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to thank the editors of this issue, three anonymous reviewers for *Atlantis*, and Susan Anderson, Karen Dubinsky, Sue Hendler, Margaret Little, and Ki Namaste for their assistance in the preparation of this article.

ENDNOTES

1. The term "transgender" was first brought into use by Virginia Prince in her book, *The Transvestite and his Wife*. While the term has the narrower definition (intended by Prince) of non-operative transsexual, I have chosen, following current usage in the transgendered community, to use it in its broader sense which is meant to include transsexuals, transgendered people, intersexed individuals, androgynes, etc. In the text that follows I use the term "transgendered men" and "transgendered women" so that gender attribution refers to the identity claimed by the person concerned, regardless of their sex assignment at birth or status as pre- or post-operative

transsexual. This is at odds with medical convention which generally continues to refer to people according to their birth-sex up until, and even after sex-reassignment.

2. One of the more notable instances of this has been the Michigan Women's Festival's institution of a "womyn-born-womyn only" policy created to exclude transgendered women from the site. See Califia, pp. 277-279. Another instance was the threatened boycott of Olivia Records, a feminist recording label, in the wake of the publication of Raymond's book, in which Raymond criticized Olivia for having Sandy Stone, a transgendered woman, as a member of their collective. After several months of receiving hate mail, death threats and threats of assault, and fearing the financial collapse of the business, Stone was asked to leave the collective. See Califia, pp. 106-7 and Sandy Stone, "The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto," in Julia Epstein and Kristina Straub, eds., *Body Guards: The Cultural Politics of Gender Ambiguity*, (New York and London: Routledge), pp. 280-304 .

3. The exception to this might be, again, where the transsexual experience is then appropriated to the feminist demand to change the attributions of specific gender characteristics to a particular sex. This approach assumes that gender attributes or roles always equal gender identity. Transsexuals who undergo sex change are thereby understood as lost to the feminist project.

Margrit Eichler, for example, argues that "transsexuals are people who suffer so deeply from the sex structure that they are willing to endure terrible pain and loneliness in order to reduce their suffering. This group of people would - potentially - be the most potent group of people pressing for changes in the sex structure, because their aversion to 'sex appropriate' roles is apparently insurmountable. By declaring them, by surgical fiat, as members of the other sex, this change potential is diverted and becomes as conservative as it could have been revolutionary" (Eichler, "Sex Change Operations: The Last Bulwark of the Double Standard" in E.D. Nelson and B.W. Robinson, (eds.) *Gender in the 1990's*, p. 36) .

4. Nataf, p. 17. (I have both adapted and extended his list here.)

5. "Third sex" refers to people who define themselves as neither male nor female, but instead as belonging to another gendered group. There are historical instances of societies which have a third gender group, such as the *hijra* in India. For this and other examples, see Ramet, 1996 and Feinberg, 1996. "Two-spirited" is a term used by some native North American cultures to refer to people understood to have both male and female qualities. Some transgendered people have adopted this self-definition. "Intersex" refers to those whose sex at birth is not readily defined as either male or female, usually because the baby had full or partial genitals of both sexes. Typically, these children receive surgery and/or hormonal treatment to conform to either male or female anatomy. "Androgyne" refers to someone whose sex is not readily apparent, often someone who combines both male and female gender characteristics, or who avoids gender presentation altogether. "Epicene" is the least familiar of these terms, but gaining popularity. It is both adjective and noun, and means "partaking of the characteristics of both sexes; common to both sexes; worn or inhabited by both sexes."

6. The *Standards of Care: The Hormonal and Surgical Sex Reassignment of Gender Dysphoric Persons* were developed by the founding committee of the Harry Benjamin International Gender Dysphoria Association in 1979 (Walker et al., 1979). Pat Califia offers some insightful commentary on the historical shaping of medical conventions in the "treatment" of transgendered people in *Sex Changes* (Califia 1996, Ch.2 especially).

REFERENCES

American Psychiatric Association. "Diagnostic Criteria for 302.50, Transsexualism," *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 4th edition, revised. Washington: American Psychiatric Association, 1987.

Beemyn, Brett and Mickey Eliason, eds. *Queer Studies: A Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Anthology*. New York and London: New York University Press, 1996.

Bornstein, Kate. *Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women, and the Rest of Us*. New York: Routledge, 1994.

Califia, Pat. *Sex Changes: The Politics of Transgenderism*. San Francisco: Cleis Press 1997.

Ekins, Richard and Dave King, eds. *Blending Genders: Social Aspects of Cross-dressing and Sex-changing*. London and New York: Routledge, 1996.

Feinberg, Leslie. *Transgender Warriors: Making History from Joan of Arc to RuPaul*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1996.

Hausman, Bernice L. *Changing Sex: Transsexualism, Technology and the Idea of Gender*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1995.

Namaste, Ki, with Sandra Laframboise and Deborah Brady, *Transgendered People and HIV/AIDS: An Introduction to Transgendered People's Health Concerns Regarding HIV and AIDS*. High Risk Project: Vancouver, 1997.

_____. "Tragic Misreadings: Queer Theory's Erasure of Transgender Subjectivity," *Queer Studies: A Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Anthology*, Brett Beemyn and Mickey Eliason, eds.. New York and London: NYU Press, 1996.

Nataf, Zachary. *Lesbians Talk Transgender*. London: Scarlet Press, 1996.

Nelson, E.D. and Robinson, B.W. *Gender in the 1990's: Images, Realities and Issues*. Toronto: Nelson Canada, 1995.

Ramet, Sabrina Petras, ed. *Gender Reversals and Gender Cultures: Anthropological and Historical Perspectives*. London and New York: Routledge, 1996.

Raymond, Janice. *The Transsexual Empire: The Making of the She-Male*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1979.

_____. "Sexual and Reproductive Liberalism," *The Sexual Liberals and the Attack on Feminism*, Dorchen Leidholdt and Janice G. Raymond, eds. New York: Pergamon Press, 1990.

Shapiro, Judith. "Transsexualism: Reflections on the Persistence of Gender and the Mutability of Sex," *Body Guards: The Cultural Politics of Gender Ambiguity*, Julia Epstein and Kristina Straub, eds. New York and London: Routledge, 1995, pp. 248 - 79.

Stone, Sandy. "The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto," *Body Guards: The Cultural Politics of Gender Ambiguity*, Julia Epstein and Kristina Straub, eds. New York and London: Routledge, 1995, pp. 248 -79.

Walker, Paul A. with J.C. Berger, R. Green, D.R. Laub, C.L. Reynolds, Jr., and L. Wollman. *Standards of Care: The Hormonal and Surgical Sex Reassignment of Gender Dysphoric Persons*. Galveston, Texas: Janus Information Facility, 1979, (revised 1990).